

MINUTES FOR JANUARY 6, 2011
JOINING MEETING OF THE PEDESTRIAN AND TRAFFIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
AND THE WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

PTSAC Members Present: Erwin Mack, Chair; Colleen Mitchell, Vice Chair; Ramin Assa; Arthur Holmes, MCDOT; Alyce Ortuzar; Reemberto Rodriguez, Silver Spring Regional Service Center; Alan Migdall; David Anspacher, MNCPPC; John Britton, Maryland Municipal League; Cpt. Thomas Didone, MCPD; Darrel Droblich; Steve Friedman; Peter Moe, MSHA; Richard Romer representing Councilmember Ervin

PTSAC Members Absent: James D'Andrea, MCPS; David Sharp; Jack Strausman

WMCCAB Members Present: Jeff Hearle, WMCCAB Chair; Sue Knapp, KFH Group; Seth Maiman;; Ilona Hopkins, East Bethesda Citizens' Association; Marc Korman; Sally Kaplan; Peggy Dennis; Steve Baldwin; Richard Blumstein, President, Regency Estates Citizens' Association

County Staff: Jeff Dunckel, Pedestrian Safety Coordinator, MCDOT; Will Haynes, MCDOT-DTEO; William Selby, MCDOT; Nadji Kirby, SRTS, MCDOT; Fred Lees, MCDOT-DTEO; Al Roshdieh, Deputy Director; Bruce Johnston, MCDOT-TED; Dan Hardy, M-NCPCC Transportation; Ken Hartman, Director BCC Regional Service Center; Richard Bingham, B-CC RSC;

Guests:

Richard Hoyer, ACT; Jennifer Kimball, City of Rockville, City Managers Office; Ellen Paul, Luxmanor Citizens Association; Karen Green, Chevy Chase West Neighborhood Association; John Wetmore, Perils for Pedestrians TV; Joan Agerholm, Perils for Pedestrians TV; Cedric Ward, MD State Highway Administration, District 3; Edna Miller, League of Women Voters; Robert Smythe, President, Sacks Neighborhood Association; Lon Anderson, AAA Mid-Atlantic; Sarah Gantz, The Gazette Newspapers; Pete Salinger, Springfield Civic Association; Dick Fiddleman, Mohican Hills Citizens' Association; Peggy Schwartz, North Bethesda Transportation Management District ; Anne White, Friendship Heights Village Civic Association; Barbara Tauben, President, Friendship Heights Village Civic Association

1. Committee Business:

Erwin Mack, Chairman of the Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (PTSAC), called the meeting to order promptly at 7:00 pm. This meeting was to be a joint meeting between the PTSAC and the Western Montgomery County Citizens' Advisory Board (WMCCAB). Jeff Hearle, Chairman of the WMCCAB, observed that there was not yet a quorum present for the WMCCAB. Hearle stated they would work as a committee of the whole until a quorum was present. Mack explained that the PTSAC had been formed to give advice on improving pedestrian safety in Montgomery County. This is accomplished through various sub-committees formed to study issues and make recommendations. In the past, the PTSAC has gone into communities to seek input on their issues of concern regarding pedestrian safety. The WMCCAB had sent a letter, received too late to consider the issue in the last PTSAC meeting, that expressed a number of community concerns for Western Montgomery County. That is why this meeting is being held – to discuss those concerns. Depending on what comes out of tonight's discussion, these issues may be taken up in greater detail at the PTSAC's March 3 meeting, perhaps being assigned to subcommittees that the WMCCAB would be invited to work with. Mack emphasized that the charge of the PTSAC was the entire County; the PTSAC does not get into specific debates on specific intersections or road segments.

Mack invited everyone to introduce themselves, and give their geographic and organizational association. A total of thirty people sat at the tables to discuss the issues that had been raised.

MOTION: Motion to accept the November 4, 2010 minutes of the PTSAC meeting as drafted and presented was moved, seconded, and approved unanimously.

Mack invited anyone of the guests who wished to speak or make a statement to do so prior to the opening of the discussions and addressing the meeting agenda. Bob Smythe, President of the Sacks Neighborhood Association, cited the difficulty of being a pedestrian in downtown Bethesda; there is no pedestrian crossing between Bethesda Avenue and Bradley Blvd. – making it very difficult. Smythe also cited the need to better enforce existing traffic laws that protect pedestrians. John Wetmore, resident of Bradley Blvd., requested that the government build sidewalks, even when controversial, so as to improve the ease and safety of walking. "Sidewalks do make a difference," he said. Lon Anderson of AAA expressed the support and interest of the

organization and its members in improving pedestrian safety; Anderson noted that he had been involved in the topic since the first Blue Ribbon Panel report (which he was a member of) was issued in 2002.

2. Pedestrian Safety Issues of Concern for Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board:

Mack directed everyone to the letter submitted to the PTSAC last November. Mr. Leggett asked Mack to have the PTSAC review the WMCCAB letter with the PTSAC. Mack asked Jeff Dunckel and Sue Knapp to present the questions to the committee. Jeff Hearle stated that the WMCCAB saw the letter as the beginning of a dialogue, and not a final statement of issues; “WMCCAB is not seeking action tonight, but rather to start a constructive discussion,” he said. The letter had been handed out to all in the attendance, and was also available on the Pedestrian Safety Web Site. Dunckel directed everyone to the County’s Web Site where the information for this and all PTSAC meetings is posted:

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dirtmpl.asp?url=/content/DOT/Dir/pedsafety/PTSACPacket.asp>

Hearle also invited those in attendance to raise issues they have, given the allotted one hour to the discussion.

First Issue, Targeting High Incidence Areas (see letter): Mack described the High Incidence criteria for targeting pedestrian safety improvements. Knapp stated that just using HIAs to target pedestrian safety improvements short-changed other areas where improvements are needed and wanted by communities. There are areas where people want to walk, but don’t because there are no sidewalks and it is not safe to walk. As long as people won’t walk there, there will not be “incidence of collisions - - though pedestrian safety improvements are badly needed.” Knapp reported that Dunckel had discussed the issue with her, explaining that this was just one of many criteria being used to implement the County Executive’s Pedestrian Safety Initiative. Alan Migdall commented that a recent resolution passed by the PTSAC noted the need for a pedestrian and bicycle network survey and inventory to define where improvements were most needed - - how can a pedestrian or cyclist get from here to there - - legally and safely. The County Executive (CE) Initiative cites this need in one of its strategies. Dunckel explained that the specifics of the CE Initiative may not be understood, as folks may not have seen it. The Strategy was distributed to everyone at the meeting, and is also available on the web site. The targeting of High Incidence Areas was only one strategy in a seven strategy program – as outlined in the document. Strategy 2 deals specifically with improving connectivity by building sidewalks. The PTSAC is charged with helping the County implement this seven strategy program. One citizen comment was that the County needs to address how those without cars get around - - especially those with disabilities that require the use of wheelchairs or scooters. The question was asked whether anyone had ideas about what other metrics might be used to identify needs - - or what other issues, in light of the seven-strategy program, the WMCAAB members would suggest be taken up.

ACTION: Hearle stated the WMCAAB would convene a group of the same stakeholders to develop a more specific request, reflecting what they now understood to be a seven-strategy pedestrian safety program, and create a more specific deliverable/request for the PTSAC to consider - - “putting some meat on the bones.”

Peter Moe pointed out that pedestrian safety is really inseparable from mobility issues. Hence, mobility is the focus of much of the work to improve pedestrian safety. Alyce Ortuzar cited the lack of prioritization of pedestrian safety in the past, and how that needs to be changed - - such as along MD 108 in Olney. Community walks should be organized to raise awareness with officials. Steve Friedman, PTSAC Bicycle Advocate, pointed out the need to consider joint facilities - - bikeways and walkways - - in the context of where they are needed and the users. What is appropriate for one group of users in one location will be different for other users in another location. Bruce Johnston pointed out that the sidewalk program probably spends less than 5% of its budget in High Incidence Areas. The majority of the County’s work in building sidewalks is occurring where the sidewalks do not yet exist. “The County builds sidewalks where they are requested – it is presently a reactive program,” he said. Some locations, such as Tuckerman Lane, require significant engineering that requires more time and money to design and build. Such projects take longer, but are being built; such locations are not being delayed because of the High Incidence Areas. These larger projects are capital projects, and listed in the County’s CIP, noted Johnston.

Second Issue, Needing Better Coordination: Art Holmes, Director of the Department of Transportation, clarified for the group that State roads had numbers on them; County roads do not have numbers but rather just names. The State is responsible for the roads with numbers on them. The County is responsible for the remaining 5,000 lane miles of roadway. Whatever is submitted to MCDOT as a request will be submitted by the County to the State if it is an issue on a State highway, the County will not just “lay on it,” but will work with the State – but understand that there is a division of labor. If it is not a State highway, then the County is responsible for it. In emergencies, the State and the County work together, regardless of jurisdiction to address the emergency. Cedric Ward, Assistant District Engineer for State Highway Administration (SHA),

explained that the SHA Administrator had made working with communities a priority for the agency. Brian Young, the District Engineer, is establishing liaisons for each municipality. This will provide more contact to the communities and civic organizations. Knapp cited the good experience with coordination over addressing the BRAC transportation issues as a model - how lessons learned from that experience should be shared and expanded on - to deploy it on other activities. The question was asked whether agencies shared space; Al Roshdieh cited the close, almost daily coordination that occurs between agencies without sharing space. Knapp pointed out there is still some shared responsibilities on State roads - such as sidewalks which the County is responsible for. This can sometime confuse things, especially if talking to folks within agencies who may not understand these specific responsibilities. Holmes directed the group to call Jeff Dunckel, Montgomery County Pedestrian Safety Coordinator, if they had any questions about who was responsible for what.

The question was asked whether the internet could be used to track issues and complaints, so the public can see what is being identified and addressed. MCDOT recently activated a map system on its web site for snow removal to help address such questions. Migdall pointed out that the 311 system and their operators need to be equipped to answer such questions about responsibilities.

Third Issue, Consistency of New Sector Plans with Adjoining Communities: Dan Hardy, Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), commented that tonight's meeting is allowing government to inform everyone about what they are doing and how - and secondly, to get everyone better informed about the issues of concern. Hardy outlined the three stage process for land use planning: planning (master plans, functional plans, and area plans;) second - setting policies for how to implement plans, and third - implementation (reviewing and approving development plans.) In terms of White Flint, the County Council has approved a very ambitious and positive plan for White Flint; staging points are intended to make sure things are happening in adjoining communities to tie into the non-auto mode share of transportation (walking, transit, and bikes) before development proceeds. In this way, tying pedestrian connectivity into the adjoining communities will be accomplished. "We think many of these things being done are working. In Montgomery County, 3.5% (50,000) of our residents walk or bike to work. In Prince Georges and Fairfax Counties, that number is under 2%," he said. Hardy further noted that while we think we are doing pretty good in Montgomery County, we can always do better.

John Britton noted that the City of Rockville is just about to release their Rockville Pike Master Plan - this is to tie into the White Flint Sector Plan. It is not as dense as the White Flint plan, but it does carry through on the multi-modal transportation plan. An Open House on the plan is being held at Richard Montgomery High School on January 11.

Fourth Issue: Hearle stated that the fourth issue should be skipped, as the topic was similar to the discussions already held, and he wanted to reserve time at the end to allow those in attendance to speak.

Fifth Issue, Goal-Oriented Pedestrian Safety Measures - not Standard-Oriented: Fred Lees pointed out that engineers depend on guidelines and standards because they are state-wide and national in application - assuring that there is consistency between jurisdictions in the practice of traffic controls. These are also dynamic in they are being revised and changed all the time to reflect new ideas and technologies. Bicycles and Pedestrian traffic control devices are now a big part of the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD.) Often times, MCDOT receives requests for a specific solution to a specific problem; this is like the patient telling the doctor what medicine they need. He felt it would be better for traffic engineers to analyze the problem and identify the best solution to address the it. Standards and guidelines are a part of that process. Knapp commented that sometimes people would bring both a problem and a solution to the agency - and were being told no without an explanation or without a discussion of an alternate solution - they were being told that something could not be done only because it didn't meet standards. Perhaps what's needed is more dialogue; that dialogue is being started here tonight, noted Knapp and Mack. Moe responded that as a planner and behavioral safety professional, that dialogue with engineers is what he is always doing at SHA - and that what he is hearing tonight is that more dialogue with the communities on these issues is needed.

Sixth Issue, Employ a Case Manager Approach: Marc Korman stated the problem is that the information in the room tonight needs to go out into the communities that have concerns. The key is communication, coordination, and transparency. The County needs to better communicate what it is (or is not doing) and why. Seth Maiman noted that tonight's group was supportive of pedestrian safety improvements, but that some communities are resistant to such improvements - such as with sidewalks. Just because there is opposition, sometimes there are real safety issues that need to be addressed. It takes education and leadership to make these needed improvements happen.

Hearle opened the floor to those in the attendance who would like to comment or ask questions. Mack pointed out that we aren't trying to solve issues tonight, but rather to identify them so we can continue the dialogue as we work to address them. The PTSAC will take back these concerns, and discuss who should address them in a more concrete fashion, Mack said.

Barbara Tauben, Friendship Heights Civic Association wanted everyone in the room to know what a fine job the Friendship Heights community thought the WMCCAB had done with their recommendations to Mr. Leggett. While Friendship Heights is an urban, high-rise community, she said they have many of the same problems as those cited in the letter. Tauben stated that they had worked extensively with both County and State staff on many projects; while it took a lot of work, there had been some successes. The problem of "who's on first" is a continual problem - - whether an issue is the responsibility of the State or the County is the frequent question they struggle with. While the County and the State are doing many things that are beneficial, the comment tonight about the need to communicate better is key - the "who, where, and how" needs to be better communicated. One point not mentioned tonight in terms of responsibility was traffic signals and the timing of the signals. Who is responsible for signals can be one of the most confusing issues for communities. More attention should be given to clarifying traffic signal responsibilities.

Wetmore: pointed out that not only do communities have MCDOT and SHA involved, but there are a number of other entities involved with sidewalk access: PEPCO with utility poles and WSSC with Fire Hydrants. Art Holmes acknowledged this was a problem we are aware of and have been working to address with the utilities.

Karen Green, Chevy Chase West Neighborhood Association, thanked WMCCAB for the letter sent, as it very accurately conveyed the issues raised by the communities last October. While Green is very aware of who is responsible for what, responsiveness is an issue to her. Problems can languish for months; tracking would be particularly helpful. It is not all a matter of bureaucratic confusion, but of follow-through and tracking of responses.

Bob Smythe, Sacks Neighborhood Association, wanted to second Korman's earlier comment - - it is not about talking with each other, but about listening to the people outside - - the communities. He agreed with all six issues raised in the letter, and thought that the response should have been "how can we change how we do things," rather than "they are that way because...." As President of the Sacks Neighborhood Association, he has never been called to participate in any County meeting or event. He can access web sites and look things up, but there has only been a passive approach to addressing community issues and getting communities involved. Officials may be waiting there to hear from us - - but we don't know that. This results in the government adage: you're always too early with your input, until you're too late. Concerned members of the community are not always aware of when the exact moment is to be involved. As an example, Bethesda Avenue and Lot 31 are about to be torn up, which will be totally disruptive to all the pedestrians that traffic this area - - and yet nobody has explained to the community what the plan is to provide for the continued safety of the pedestrians during this 2-year disruption and the closing of Woodmont Avenue. Though the community has raised the issue before, they have never seen a Pedestrian Plan. "How will safe pedestrian access be maintained for the two years of construction?" he asked. While the community has asked to participate, they have been told it is the developer's responsibility to come up with the plan. This is wrong; it is the County's responsibility to maintain safety for its citizens. The WMCCAB letter should not be a call for rebuttals, but rather a call to do things better in ways that address the real problems. Think creatively, don't be limited to a box of what you can and cannot do. Ken Hartman asked to get together and discuss what is occurring with Lot 31. Mack invited everyone to attend the PTSAC meetings when they occur bimonthly - - these issues are of concern to the PTSAC, and it works to address them.

Ellen Paul, Luxmanor Citizens Association, said the WMCCAB letter is very much appreciated; the dialogue is critical. The case manager issue (Sixth Issue in letter) is very important. Recent meetings held on Luxmanor issues have been helpful - - she feels like progress is now being made. Of issue to the community is the White Flint sector plan, and the need to address tying in their community to the plans for White Flint. When master plans are revised every 25 years, the communities should not be left to figure out what needs to be done in their communities. It is up to the citizens now to point out the problems and concerns, rather than have them addressed in the planning process.

Mack introduced the issue of snow clearing. Art Holmes reviewed agency preparations that had been completed for snow. Improvements have been made this year. Holmes described the new web snow plowing tracking system with its web-based map now available to the public. Snow removal is a high priority for MCDOT and the County Executive.

ACTION: Holmes asked Dunckel to get the MCDOT snow web site address to the WMCCAB.

A question was asked on what the County policy was for snow removal from sidewalks and bus stops on Snow Emergency Routes. If we want encourage travel other than by automobile, clearing of pedestrian pathways should be provided for, said one member of the audience. County officials responded that the County is responsible for removing snow at bus stops. Adjacent property owners are responsible for clearing snow for the sidewalks abutting their property. The Department of Housing and Community Affairs is responsible for enforcing that requirement. Snow sometimes gets dumped on the already cleared sidewalks, rendering sidewalks impassable for weeks. Planting strips would help relieve this situation - - but too often sidewalks are constructed without planting (green) strips.

Mack asked Dunckel to give a summation of tonight's discussion. Dunckel pointed out the many individuals and represented agencies in the room tonight that are working diligently to address the issue of improving pedestrian safety; the community now has a very large team that has been assembled and motivated by the County Executive's Initiative to improve pedestrian safety and make our communities more walkable. There is now a unified desire at all levels of government - - State, local, and even the Feds - - to make things safer for pedestrians. MCDOT should have come to the Western Montgomery County Community sooner to talk about the program, what is being done, and to listen to the community's concerns. These issues are being looked at in way they have not been looked at before. Pedestrian and bicycle access are now being placed high on the agenda of our transportation modes. Dunckel asked that the agencies and the Western Montgomery community continue the dialogue started tonight. MCDOT understands that it is confusing to citizens regarding who to talk to about what; Dunckel asked everyone to provide MCDOT the opportunity to connect you to right people to be able address the issues that concern the communities - to resolve the issues and address the safety problems that are real out there. The County does seem to be making some progress. Dunckel noted the statistics indicate we may have reduced the increases that we were experiencing in pedestrian collisions; and pedestrian fatalities went down for the second year in a row. The County is now pushing on all fronts to change things and make it safer for pedestrians. Dialogue with the community - - knowing where these safety issues are most severe - - is critical to the programs success.

Sue Knapp suggested that MCDOT reach out to the Western Montgomery County community to participate in the planned pilot for doing the pedestrian network assessment. There is a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of energy in the community that could be helpful to the effort. Mack identified Ramin Assa as the PTSAC sub-committee chair spearheading the effort. Assa asked the meeting participants to let him know of their concerns about sidewalks. Friedman suggested that a similar effort could be applied to bicycle facilities, as the bicycle network for Western Montgomery County is being planned and improved.

3. PTSAC Sub-Committee Reports, Updates, and Recommendations:

Annual Report Approval: Colleen Mitchell has completed a draft of the 2010 Annual Report. Mitchell thanked everyone for the contributions to the report. Dunckel asked for everyone's input and edits by January 14. The report will then be finalized and submitted to the County Executive before the meeting scheduled for February 10. Mack, Jack Strausman, and Ortuzar will be attending the meeting.

Sidewalks-Pedestrian Network – Ramin Assa and Alan Migdall: Assa said tonight's meeting had been an excellent chance to hear from the communities. Assa needs to move ahead to identify two areas for a pilot assessment of pedestrian networks; Assa and Dunckel will be meeting with some experts next week. Mack will be meeting with Hearle in the next couple of weeks to discuss how the PTSAC can help address the issues discussed tonight. A pilot neighborhood can be discussed.

Bicycle Access and Safety: Schedule to Consider Friedman Proposals from November. Steven Friedman reported that experts in the Capital Bike Sharing program have been asked to attend the March meeting to provide an update on what is being done to bring this program into the County - - and what issues need to be resolved. The program is moving ahead in the region (Arlington and D.C.) and needs to be expanded into Montgomery County. The program is successful and growing in Europe - - including the increase of scooters/motorcycles. Britton reported that the Tiger II Grant Rockville had been part of - -to fund the expansion of Capital Bike Share - - had been rejected, and private grants sought had been unsuccessful. Holmes stated that there was support for bike sharing in both the Executive and Legislative Branch in the County - - it was an issue of economics: how to pay for it. Assa pointed out that bike sharing, and the availability of bikes, goes hand in hand with creating the bikeways and facilities to be able to use them. Friedman pointed out that why D.C. has been seeing such success with bike sharing is they are laying out many miles of bike lanes on their streets.

The issue of bike lanes and facilities, specifically to improve bicycle connectivity between Bethesda and Friendship Heights, is being deferred until Friedman can confer with David Anspacher (MNCPPC) and Peter Moe (SHA) on the topic of improved bicycle facilities.

Bicycle Ride-along: A common theme has been voiced that there is a lack of bicycle facilities, as well as education and enforcement, because there is sometimes a lack of understanding of the issues confronting bicycle safety. The proposal is that if a series of bicycle trips (Ride-alongs) could be organized for various County personnel and decision-makers, then everyone would have a better understanding of the issues. Both inexperienced and experienced cyclists could come out and see what it is like on the streets, riding a bike, fostering a greater understanding of the issues. Perhaps this would help propel the needed creative solutions.

MOTION: Friedman moved that a series of Bicycle Ride-alongs be organized with the County to allow people involved with the issue of transportation and safety to better understand the issues being faced by the County's bicyclists. The bicycle advocates in this community would lead the Ride-alongs; anyone is invited but invitations are directed to professionals and decision-makers involved with transportation programs, with Friedman/PTSAC sending out the invitations and conducting the planning for the events. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Reemberto Rodriguez reported that in Silver Spring, Casey Anderson, a bicycle advocate, had proposed such a Ride-along be held in the Longbranch Community. Moe suggested bringing together media attention on the event. Friedman wants to convene a small planning committee/work group to put together the event.

ACTION: Friedman will convene a small work group to plan the event over the winter, to be conducted in the spring.

5. Update on Safe Routes to School (SRTS):

Dunckel introduced Nadji Kirby, the new Safe Routes to School Coordinator, who started with MCDOT the end of September. Kirby explained the program and provided a summary report on the status since she started working with it - - MCDOT is currently working on Grant D schools - - a new set of schools (see handout). International Walk to School Day was Kirby's first event in the job; over 30 schools participated. Student and parent surveys (over 14,000) were sent out in October to evaluate the number of children walking or biking to school and the factors affecting that. The surveys have shown that for Grant B and Grant C schools, there was an increase in the number of children walking and biking to those schools. Kirby has been familiarizing herself with the County schools, and their administrators, and has been working with area organizations such as the Washington Area Bicycle Association (WABA) to conduct safety training activities and other events. She is also working with the Police to be more strategic in how the County couples education and engineering improvements with enforcement activities at the schools.

Mack asked about the crossing guards; it was reported they work for the MCPD under the supervision of Captain Didone. Didone offered to bring the supervisor of the program to meet with the PTSAC. Ilona Hopkins suggested working with the PTSAC members to let them know this activity was going on; she had not been aware of the program. Kirby reported she would be meeting with them in January. Al Roshdieh emphasized that this was one of the documented successful programs of the Pedestrian Safety Initiative. Migdall asked about the schools evaluated; if all schools have had safety evaluations. Britton asked whether the municipalities were part of the program. Some clarification was needed on how the municipalities' elementary schools are or aren't selected in the County's grant requests; Moe reported that the municipalities had separate grant requests. The County coordinates with the municipalities and has worked to provide them information that they use in their own grant requests.

6. New Business/Committee Comments:

Attendance of CE Annual Meeting: February 10 - - Jack Strausman, Alyce Ortuzar, Erwin Mack, and Jeff Dunckel will attend. Next Meeting - will be held in the 9th Floor Conference Room of the EOB. Rodriguez invited the committee to hold a meeting at the Silver Spring Municipal Building anytime.

Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm

Next Scheduled Meeting Date: March 3, 2011

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